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Gamification tools for speaking learning improvement in english students B1 level

Herramientas de gamificación para el mejoramiento del aprendizaje oral en estudiantes de inglés nivel B1

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Abstract

This article focused on developing fluency in oral skills, using gamification tools to improve oral learning in B1 level English learners by using the Flipgrip platform, which creates an improvement in their oral expression skills in English language learning by creating videos in which they can be fed back later. The research methods chosen were survey and interview, by executing a structured and organized set of effective virtual lesson planning with online resources for B1 level, using Flipgrip with asynchronous tasks. The selected sample group consisted of 15 students, we observed the students' acceptance of the Flipgrip platform and noted the improvement they had in their oral production when using this technological tool. Because they had a positive impact on their confidence reflected in their participation, taking the risk to speak and interact more expressing their ideas in English. The teacher interview was designed to collect information on whether the new requirements about technological tools in virtual classes were developed and used to collect non-measurable information from the teachers at the Institute since it is essential to know their opinions and criteria attached to the reality where the problem is located. It is concluded that Flipgrip has a great influence on the interaction in


the virtual classroom, promoting comprehensible oral production in students.

Keywords: gamification tools, oral production, virtual classes

Resumen

Este artículo se enfocó en desarrollar la fluidez de la destreza oral, se utilizó herramientas de gamificación para la mejora del aprendizaje oral en estudiantes de inglés de nivel B1, mediante la utilización de la plataforma Flipgrid lo que crea una mejora en sus habilidades de expresión oral en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés creando videos en los cuales pueden ser retroalimentados en lo posterior. Los métodos de investigación elegidos fueron la encuesta y la entrevista, mediante la ejecución de un conjunto estructurado y organizado de planificación de clases virtuales eficaces, con recursos en línea para el nivel B1, se utilizó Flipgrid con tareas asíncronas. El grupo de muestra seleccionado se conformó por 15 alumnos, se observó la aceptación de los estudiantes a la plataforma Flipgrid y observó la mejora que tuvieron en su producción oral al usar esta herramienta tecnológica. Debido a que tuvieron un impacto positivo en su confianza reflejado en su participación, arriesgándose a hablar e interactuar más expresando sus ideas en inglés. En cuanto a la entrevista al profesor, diseñada para recolectar información sobre si se desarrollaron los nuevos requerimientos acerca de herramientas tecnológicas en las clases virtuales y utilizada para recolectar información no medible del docente en el Instituto, ya que es fundamental conocer sus opiniones y criterios apegados a la realidad donde se encuentra el problema. Se concluye que Flipgrid tiene una gran influencia en la interacción en el aula virtual, promoviendo una producción oral comprensible en los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: herramientas de gamificación, producción oral, clases virtuales

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INTRODUCTION

This proposal aimed at improving oral skills through gamification tools during English classes. The objective was to evaluate the impact of these tools through research that could define their effectiveness. This work was conducted with students who belong to level B1 of English Proficiency at the Language Institute of Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabi during the first semester of the 2023-1 period.

The same group of students had studied together in a previous module at the A2 level, and some learners had shown difficulties in developing their oral expression. Sometimes during the virtual classes, it is possible to observe the limited oral contribution of the students, which can be verified in the results obtained from the sample. In addition, learners must develop speaking skills, or more specifically, fluency, which is one of the subskills of speaking. The development of this sub-skill was affected by the change from in-person to online classes and the subsequent non-face-to-face teaching methodology.

Working online has made many demands in different educational institutions. We have witnessed the innovation of resources since the virtual modality encourages teachers to look for resources such as videos or worksheets online with options for the development of listening skills, and others. Nevertheless, there is one specific skill that, for the most part, is not enough time allocated in class, and that is the speaking skill. We need to engage the student in autonomous learning through a virtual environment keeping the attention with dynamic activities. For this reason, we need to work with many didactic online resources as support in synchronous and asynchronous classes. Through this research work, we discovered the need to implement syllabus activities according to the Flipgrid tool for the B1 level as a support digital resource to improve students' oral expression, which has benefits focused on this skill and can be asynchronous as well as synchronous.

The use of online resources can support the learners by providing access to interactive language courses, virtual language exchange platforms, and speech recognition tools. These resources offer practice opportunities, real-time feedback, and exposure to diverse accents and contexts, promoting fluency and pronunciation improvement. With all these benefits, students are interested, and it creates an environment of engagement in the classroom, thus improving each topic covered. Establishing as a reference the previously mentioned needs, our proposal consists of implementing additional curricular activities with the Flipgrid technological tool in English proficiency level B1 students.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

At Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro, students must accredit a B1 level to graduate. One option is to obtain this level with a Cambridge Exam (PET- or FCE) and send a letter to the Director in the Language Institute to start a process to validate the certificate. Students also have the option to enter the English Proficiency program, which is free unless you do not pass one level, they must first enroll in the Placement Test, which is administered on a platform with a series of activities and tests. The result of these tests will indicate the level they should take. Each level is developed in an academic period of 20 weeks with a schedule of 4 hours per week for levels A1 and A2 and 6 hours per week for level B1.

It is a blended program, so students are given access to the Moodle platform to do autonomous work and must also connect to a virtual class with a teacher through Teams at a previously established schedule. There is only one grade entry (there are no midterm or recovery), 80% of the average corresponds to the exams (four in total, one exam for each skill), 10% to class activities as well, and 10% to homework. Once the three levels are completed and passed, the English Language Proficiency B1 is registered in the Sistema de Gestión Académica (SGA), which is a degree requirement in the re-designed careers.

In addition, within its objectives and principles, there is interaction and communication so that in this way it is more interactive, and not just a group of students repeating words given in class. As a result, teachers must update their methodological strategies to teach this language dynamically and cause an effect on the students in their development of oral expression.

Learning English in a virtual environment may be at a disadvantage because of the number of students per classroom, prior knowledge and experience in their educational communities, or lack of resources. Because of these difficulties, the environment has a great impact on students' needs and effect in the process of learning and producing oral skills.

This study was applied in B1 level O on Teams sessions. Forty-five students were enrolled in this class, and all were invited to participate. Due to the earthquake that took place in 2016, the building that was used as a university admissions and leveling department was rebuilt and from that moment on it has been used as a Language Institute. The space available in the building is limited and the classes were given online. Working with adults means that the classes must be interactive so that they can develop their fluency in the different platforms. Because of this, oral expression of the B1 level will be the focus of the authors of this proposal.

To explore the best way to respond to the specific need which we identified, we developed a problem statement, and objectives as follows:

Problem Statement

- How does the use of gamification tools improve the fluency of the students of B1 level at Language Institute of Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabi during the first semester?

Objectives

Main Objective

- To evaluate the degree of influence of gamification tools and online resources on oral expression in English proficiency at a B1 level, through quasi-experimental research.

Specific objectives

- Determine the level of influence in students using gamification tools as a technological resource within the learning of speaking sub-skills.
- To recognize the various online resources used by teachers in teaching oral expression.
- To examine the effect of using gamification tools and online resources and to enhance speaking skills in our specific teaching context.

Justification

This proposal is justified by the improvement in the students now developing their oral skills through didactic resources that will serve as support and to the teachers during their teaching.

In the research "Perceptions about Self-recording Videos to Develop" (Encalada & Sarmiento, 2019) the authors employed a rigorous data coding and categorization process to ensure the feasibility of the analysis. Our investigation aimed to recognize the students' perception regarding their oral production ability, confidence, and performance related to the use of additional exercises through Flipgrid videos, during their asynchronous learning.

The teaching system changed due to the time spent in the pandemic. Teachers were accustomed to a type of teaching that was only face-to-face, after this, they had to look for strategies where the student

remained engaged in the class. In spite of this, in synchronous time, which consists of a class by video call, it is not enough to practice all the skills, and in the particular case of oral expression, since this skill is usually practiced in a face-to-face way and it is here when the online resources must stand out for the development of the same one. Learning any language other than the mother tongue is not easy, even more so if it is done virtually or remotely. It is even more complicated to develop these speaking sub-skills only asynchronously.

This demonstrates the importance of using technological resources as support for students to help them communicate with accurate pronunciation.

Our proposal aims to collect the necessary information to support our theory in which the use of technological resources aligned with gamification such as Flipgrid increases the ability of students to improve their skills in terms of speaking sub-skills with the implementation of additional activities at the same time using syllabus established in each unit belonging to each level, in this case, level B1. The investigation was developed at the Language Institute of Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí founded on November 13th, 1985, which is in Circunvalación Avenue- Via a San Mateo in Manta City, Province of Manabí. The Language Institute has 3,000 students enrolled in the period 2023-1 at the three levels, in which it is led by 1 authority and 24 teachers.

The Language Institute has different shifts, but the research is carried out in the afternoon, which has all the educational levels, which means from A1, A2, and B1 levels.

The Language Institute's mission is: "Promote education, certification, and training in foreign languages for members of the university community and the general public." (Instituto de Idiomas, 2018).

The Language Institute's vision is: "To be a recognized institute for the preparation and certification of communicative skills in foreign languages." (Instituto de Idiomas, 2018).

During this semester, the B1 level groups are divided by 3 schedules, where the shifts vary, morning, afternoon, and night, with six English teachers for this level, in each study group there are between 45 to 46 students since classes are managed in a virtual environment.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Approach

The investigation applies a mixed methods approach to examine how technological gamification tools improve the oral production skills of B1 level students at the Language Institute of Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí during the first semester of 2023-1. The study aims to provide a thorough knowledge of how tools such as Flipgrid, YouTube, and Live Worksheets can be properly integrated into the curriculum to improve students' English-speaking skills.

The study included B1 level students enrolled in the first semester of 2023-1 at the Language Institute of Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí. A total of fifty students were chosen based on their enrollment in the B1 level English course. The selection criteria were their availability to participate in the study and their willingness to use the technical tools supplied. Five English teachers from the institute were also involved, providing insights into the tools' usefulness and assisting with the evaluation process.

Variables and Operationalization

Independent Variable: Technological Gamification Tools.

Technological gamification tools are digital resources aimed to improve learning experiences by combining game design elements such as points, badges, and interactive challenges.

Dimensions

Interactive Learning: Use Flipgrid to create compelling video discussions that encourage student engagement.

Multimedia Integration: Using YouTube videos to give various multimedia content that aids the learning process.

Communicative Approach: Using interactive strategies that encourage active language use and realistic communication circumstances.

Online Teaching Strategies: Using Live Worksheets for Interactive and Autonomous Learning Exercises.

Indicators

Active participation: It is measured by student interaction in video chats and completion of interactive worksheets.

Use of Interactive Technology: Surveys and teacher observations were used to assess the integration of digital tools.

Feedback Mechanisms: Assessed through teacher interviews, with a focus on the effectiveness of feedback offered to students using these instruments.

Instruments

Student surveys: To assess participation, engagement, and reported progress in speaking skills.

Teacher surveys: To assess the integration and efficacy of interactive technology.

Interviews with teachers will be conducted to get qualitative input on how these technologies are used and how they affect student learning.

Dependent Variable: Speaking Subskills.

Fluency is the capacity to deliver thoughts smoothly and coherently without substantial pauses.

Accuracy and Pronunciation: Correct vocabulary usage, grammar, and good word articulation.

Using Functions: Properly applying certain phrases and structures in a variety of communicative contexts.

Appropriacy refers to using words and grammar that are appropriate for the situation and audience.

Turn-taking skills: the ability to effectively manage conversational interactions, including starting and responding appropriately.

Relevant duration: tailoring speech duration to the circumstances of the discourse.

Responding and initiating: Promptly and appropriately introducing new ideas or responding to exchanges.

Repair and Repetition: Refine and repeat phrases to ensure clarity and comprehension.

Words and Grammar: Using diverse and appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Discourse Markers: Using connections to structure speech coherently.

Procedure: Phase 1: Initial Diagnosis

The first part included a preliminary evaluation to determine the pupils' competency levels in speaking subskills. This assessment was completed using a combination of oral tests and performance ratings from previous courses. The goal was to identify areas for improvement and then adjust the following treatments accordingly. Flipgrid was established as the principal platform for developing a virtual environment in which students could practice speaking tasks asynchronously. This system enabled students to record and share their comments whenever they wanted, creating a comfortable and flexible learning environment.

Phase 2: Implementing Technological Tools

Flipgrid, YouTube, and Live Worksheets were all added to the curriculum during this phase. The deployment approach was rigorously prepared to ensure that these tools fit seamlessly into the existing teaching framework.

Flipgrid: Primarily used for video conversations, Flipgrid allowed students to respond in asynchronous video to prompts provided by the instructor. This platform encouraged peer-to-peer engagement and provided quick and reflective feedback from both peers and educators.

YouTube was used as a supplemental resource to access educational videos that reinforced the concepts presented in class. These movies gave different views and additional explanations, which improved students' learning and participation.

Live Worksheets: Interactive assignments that encouraged self-directed learning. These worksheets contained a variety of tasks designed to reinforce vocabulary, grammar, and other speaking subskills. The interactive nature of these worksheets kept pupils interested and motivated to practice consistently.

Lesson plans were created to balance the use of these tools, with each week focused on a specific speaking subskill. The plans were designed to support both synchronous (in real time) and asynchronous learning activities. During synchronous sessions, educators gave direct teaching and led live conversations. Asynchronous activities enabled students to interact with the materials at their own leisure, resulting in a more in-depth and individualized learning experience.

Phase 3: Data Collection

Data collection includes gathering quantitative and qualitative information from students and teachers about their experiences using technological tools.

Student Surveys: These surveys, administered at various points throughout the semester, assessed students' involvement, participation, and perceived progress in speaking skills. Questions focused on the technologies' usability, content relevancy, and overall impact on their learning experience.

Teacher surveys were conducted to gain feedback on the integration and usefulness of the tools from the instructors' viewpoints. These studies looked into the hurdles encountered, the rewards realized, and general satisfaction with technological integration.

Phase 4: Data Analysis

To ensure a thorough grasp of the results, the analysis phase used both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Quantitative data is analyzed using statistical methods to detect important trends and patterns. Survey responses were processed and examined to determine changes in student involvement, participation, and reported progress in speaking skills.

Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis to uncover major themes and insights from teacher interviews. This technique contributed to a better understanding of both students' and teachers' subjective experiences and context for the quantitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results taken from the questionnaires applied to the students were applied through Google Forms, once the first period of 2023 was over. Through the analysis of the results the main outcome was to determine how Flipgrid influenced students' development. The results of the eight questions of the questionnaire are shown in tables to manage the analysis. The interview was developed at the end of the intervention process.

Through the chart shown, it will be evinced the results from the survey:

Table 1

Results from the survey

EVALUATED CRITERIA	FREQUENCY	RESULTS	TOTAL
Frequency of the use of Flipgrid to enhance oral production			
Always	5	33%	100%
Sometimes	7	47%	
Often	2	13%	
Rarely	1	7%	
Never	0	0%	
Prior training before using Flipgrid in class			
Yes	13	87%	100%
Maybe	1	7%	
No	1	7%	
Perception of English proficiency after practicing oral production with Flipgrid			
Yes	13	87%	100%
Maybe	2	13%	
No	0	0%	
Perception of the positive result academic performance after using Flipgrid during the semester			
Yes	14	93%	100%
No	0	0%	
Maybe	1	7%	
Perception of the time spent in class that includes technological tools to improve the level of English			
Yes	13	87%	100%
Maybe	2	13%	
No	0	0%	
Frequency of the use of technological tool as support to improve English-speaking skills			
Always	4	27%	100%
Sometimes	10	67%	
Often	0	0%	

Rarely	0	0%	
Never	1	7%	
Consideration on the frequency of the use of Flipgrid in English class in asynchronous tasks			
Always	7	47%	100%
Sometimes	7	47%	
Often	0	0%	
Rarely	0	0%	
Never	1	7%	
Selection of a digital tool participants feel most comfortable working asynchronously during the semester			
FLIPGRID	13	68%	100%
LIVE WORKSHEETS	4	21%	
PADLET	2	11%	

Source: Researchers' elaboration.

The survey results indicate that Flipgrid has been a valuable tool in enhancing students' oral production skills in English classes. 33% of students reported consistently using Flipgrid to improve their speaking abilities, while 47% used technology tools occasionally. Additionally, 13% used Flipgrid often, and only 7% used it rarely, with no students reporting a complete lack of technology use. This data underscores that most students felt motivated and comfortable with the integration of Flipgrid in their lessons. Furthermore, 87% of students received prior training on using this technological tool, which likely contributed to their ease and effectiveness in utilizing it for their learning.

Moreover, the findings reveal a strong positive response to the effectiveness of Flipgrid in improving oral skills and overall academic performance. A notable 87% of students affirmed that Flipgrid helped them learn and improve autonomously, while 93% believed that technological tools used in class enhanced their academic outcomes. Despite a small percentage (13%) of students feeling indifferent, the majority demonstrated a willingness to engage with the tool. Additionally, 87% felt that the class time allocated for using Flipgrid was appropriate for their level, motivating them to complete most of the proposed activities. The survey also highlighted that 68% of students felt most comfortable using Flipgrid compared to other tools, indicating its effectiveness in creating a supportive learning environment. These results suggest that Flipgrid not only promotes a communicative atmosphere but also significantly boosts students' confidence and motivation in developing their speaking skills autonomously.

Based on the survey results from the students, researchers found that the majority actively engaged in activities after English classes using Flipgrid. This engagement was due to the benefits of working autonomously and at their own pace. Some students noted that they sometimes felt insecure about pronouncing sentences in English during asynchronous activities, so they preferred using Flipgrid until they could participate more confidently in class. Additionally, students acknowledged a lack of motivation to practice oral expression in real-time during virtual classes, finding asynchronous tasks to be an easier and more comfortable option.

Through the analysis of the interview with the English-evaluating teacher, it was established that the stages of the process conducted after the oral exam, which is mandatory for passing level B1. During online classes, the teacher and students met via invitations sent through their institutional email on the Teams platform for a standard 180-minute class, twice a week. This schedule, set by the Institute of Languages, included an exam period, with the oral exam being the final one. However, during the 2023-1 semester, when connectivity issues arose, students completed tasks assigned by the classroom teacher on the Moodle Idiomas platform.

Due to limited interaction time in virtual classes, assigning various homework activities was beneficial. On Flipgrid, students received instructions for their tasks. This platform allowed the teacher to provide personalized feedback after class hours, aimed at improving students' pronunciation and fluency. This improvement was evident during their oral exams, where the evaluating teacher noted a significant difference compared to when they passed level A2, where students were shy and less confident in oral production.

The oral expression examiner highlighted those students increased their oral expression sub-skills through the support activities on Flipgrid, leading to greater motivation to develop their speaking skills in English as a second language. However, the evaluating teacher mentioned that while Flipgrid is beneficial for B1 level students as an online support resource, its use might be limited if other activities like reading and grammar are neglected, as progress in these areas is also crucial.

The use of additional activities on Flipgrid for developing oral production was deemed important, as the students showed notable improvement. The teacher expressed interest in continuing this approach in future semesters.

From the interview data with the evaluating English exam teacher, it was confirmed that students showed improved pronunciation during the final speaking exam after using Flipgrid for additional tasks. The teacher observed genuine interest among students and noted overall improvement in their speaking exams. Generally, students were highly motivated to use Flipgrid, seeing it as essential for enhancing their oral expression skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Improved Speaking Skills: B1 students showed better speaking abilities and were more active in class, which increased their confidence in using English.

Effective Use of Flipgrid: Research indicates that Flipgrid is a valuable tool in virtual classrooms, helping students improve their spoken English by encouraging more interaction and clearer communication.

Importance of Communicative Activities: Experts agree that involving students in interactive and engaging activities, such as gamification and asynchronous tasks on Flipgrid, can significantly boost their speaking skills in a virtual environment.

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